

## OLD-STYLE VERSUS NEW-STYLE PRACTICE.

BY E. P. HURD, M. D., NEWBURYPORT, MASS.

WHEN I commenced the practice of medicine the traditional saddle-bags had not quite gone out of fashion, and the physician was expected to carry about on his person the principal resources of the *materia medica*. Then, as even now in very many country places, the physician was his own apothecary. Having his drugs about him in their crude shape he could not be very nice about the mode of their administration. Children remembered and shunned him from instinctive dread at the remembrance of his nauseous doses. His "C. cum J." and "pil. rufi" made the strawberry jam of the good dame's pantry long obnoxious to her children in accordance with the law of association of ideas.

Now things are fast changing for the better, at least in regions that are not outside the pale of modern civilization. No more nasty castor-oil, but delicate emulsions sweetened and flavored with peach blossom and vanilla, which our patrons' children take to with avidity; the oil of the cod in honeyed potion, emulsified and digested, and fit for instantaneous absorption; laxative elixirs that have driven jalap, rhubarb, etc., out of respectable usage. And then think of the parvules, the gelatine-coated pilules, the tiny, tidy capsules, and the fascinating elixirs! And last, but not least, the wonderful variety of malt extracts which our patients declare are so appetizing! To be sure, our apothecaries complain of the hardship of having to buy all these nice things, and exclaim that even the *Pharmacopœia* is going out of fashion. It may be so, for the pleasant elixirs of the manufacturing chemists are fast superseding the old-time tinctures.

There may be a gain in all this, and there may be an evil, — an evil in so far as we substitute for reliable preparations of known strength those which, while advertised to contain such and such medicaments in such and such proportions, are mere sophistications, the exponents of cupidity, avarice, and dishonesty. I have had personal evidence that some of the elixirs of quinine, caffeine, pepsine, etc., are frauds, and that sugar-coated pills and compressed pills do not always contain all that they are advertised to contain. Granting, however, the reliability of these niceties in pharmaceuticals, I think there is unquestionably a gain over the old modes of medication. I believe that it will hold true that a medicine is generally more efficacious that is administered in a pleasant and palatable form. I do not attempt to explain *why*; but I see no reason why remedies which are offensive to the gustatory nerves should not be offensive to the sensory nerves of the whole alimentary canal, and thus antagonize absorption. The membranous apparatus of the veins and absorbents are so far living things that they have their likes and dislikes. Certain it is that I have found in my own person that the bromide of potassium is better tolerated and more efficacious when dissolved in simple elixir or "anise cordial" than when taken in watery solution, and I have patients whose experience is similar. Three cases have just come to my knowledge of persons living in this city who have long been epileptic; these patients were for years treated by a combination of the bromides (two of them by myself) with no satisfactory results. The prescription of the potassium salt in an agreeable combination with cinchona by a Pennsylvania quack has given all three patients an exemption for four months from epileptiform attacks, — *petit mal*, *grand mal*, and everything. I have no interest in recording this fact except that the truth should be told, even if it be against ourselves. In two of the cases my watery solution of the potassium bromide — one-gramme dose — failed to have the slightest effect in arresting the paroxysms; there were constantly diurnal and nocturnal attacks of *petit mal*, with very frequent attacks of *grand mal*. The mixture from Pennsylvania has been thoroughly analyzed by Mr. Carl Castelhaus (practical chemist) and by myself, and proved to contain no mineral ingredient but potassium bromide, and that in the proportion of one gramme to the dose; the excipient is compound infusion of cinchona with alcohol. I need not repeat that the effect was immediate, and so far has been permanent. The difference in results cannot be explained by any vague theories about the influence of mind over body, but by the theory — of which we are continually receiving striking confirmations — that medicines which are made palatable are thereby rendered more acceptable to the stomach and more readily gain access, through absorption, to parts physiologically susceptible to their influence. If they offend the sensory nerves of the alimentary canal the probability is that they will prove irritant to the nervous system generally, and be

speedily expelled through the organs of excretion before they have exercised their special physiological influence.

In dismissing this topic, which might be expanded into a treatise, I would say that it is very important that in the exercise of our functions as family physicians we should be on good terms with the little folks. This requires not only patience with their whims and foibles, but some degree of catering to the gustatory sense of our juvenile patrons. Many a family physician of the regular persuasion has been abandoned for a homœopath because the children would not take the nauseous medicines of the regular. Here the nice "parvules" which contain minute doses in sugary disguise come to our rescue. Here the simple elixirs often serve a good turn; we dilute them with water, add our aconite, veratrum, etc., and children seldom object to them. Calomel, chlorate of potash, ipecac, etc., can be rubbed up with sugar and flavored so as to be quite agreeable to the infantile palate. Astringents, as tannin, catechu, are generally well tolerated in the traditional chalk mixture.

"What a blessing is citrate of magnesia," said a mother to me the other day, "and the milk of magnesia! These preparations are suited to so many complaints of children, and they never refuse to take them."

This is a common but not universal experience. I have on my visiting list little "sons of Belial" that have an inborn antipathy to everything that is called medicine. They are a trial to all kinds of practitioners.

I have endeavored in this article to indicate one of the tendencies of the times, — to eliminate from the materia medica hosts of unpalatable drugs, or find for them an excipient that shall divest them of their unpalatableness. We aim to treat diseases "*tuto, cito, et jucunde*," but we emphasize the *jucunde*.

#### UNUSUAL ACTION OF MERCURY AND CHLORAL.

MR. EDITOR, — Perhaps the peculiar action of two common remedies upon the person of a young married lady, who came here some time since for advice, may not be uninteresting to some of your readers. We often find people who "cannot take quinine or morphine." Occasionally such an idiosyncrasy really does exist, just as it is possible for some people to be essentially poisoned by some common article of food or drink; for instance, the production of urticaria through the use of oatmeal, shell-fish, or sour-kraut. I have known honey to produce an intense gastralgia in a lady who was very fond of it. The continued use of buckwheat will often cause a crop of boils in certain persons. Physicians are prone to regard with suspicion the statement of patients (especially ladies) who "cannot take" this or that remedy, — a suspicion which is often too well justified by their experience; but it is simply barbarous when an idiosyncrasy has been well proven to continue the exhibition of obnoxious remedies upon the theory that the imagination is to blame for all these phenomena. An instance came to my knowledge recently of a gentleman upon whom the action of any form of opium is distressing, producing a sense of constriction at the pit of the stomach similar to that caused by placing one pole of a galvanic battery over the stomach and the other on the dorsal vertebræ, and passing a powerful current of electricity through that organ. Having been a witness for a year or two past of the unusual action of mercury in any of its forms, as well as the peculiar action of chloral hydrate upon the person of a lady, I trust that at least a portion of your readers will find it of sufficient interest to repay them for the time spent in perusal. Mrs. A. is a young married lady thirty years of age, with marked nervous temperament. She has never had any illness. Upon returning from Europe a few years ago she visited an infirmary in New York. Being troubled with constipation, the attending physician prescribed a pill containing some form of mercury. A few hours after taking the pill, Mrs. A. was awakened by an itching, burning sensation over the whole body. Upon examination the skin was found to be red and of a burning heat to the touch, resembling very much the skin of a child suffering from scarlatina. The distress from the burning heat and pruritus lasted for twenty-four hours, but finally subsided. The case was treated as one of erysipelas. At the end of about eight or ten days the skin over the whole body began to crack, and desquamation began; large flakes came off, as she describes it, "as large as the palm of the hand." Not a square inch of skin over the whole body failed to peel. Mrs. A. suffered no further inconvenience, except that the new